

'A-Blackmail' Warning Is Puzzle to Specialists

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President Johnson's pledge that the United States will support non-nuclear nations that are threatened with "nuclear blackmail" may contain some significant implications for the future.

The President's statement was made in his Sunday night report to the Nation on the dramatic shakeup in the Kremlin and Communist China's first nuclear blast.

On the surface, what the President promised in terms of American aid to threatened nations generally was regarded as an unexceptional statement. But its subsurface implications have become a subject of controversy and puzzlement for many foreign policy specialists.

India Reassured

The widespread impression was that the President was giving new assurance to the non-Communist nations in Asia, such as India and Japan, that might feel menaced by Red China's first nuclear blast.

That impression was reinforced by comments made by State Department officials.

Others, however, wondered if the President was declaring some large, new American nuclear defense doctrine that could apply to any nation Communist or non-Communist, that does not possess its own nuclear weapons.

Still others asked if the President may have misspoken his intentions, by the use of

unintentionally ambiguous language.

What the President said was this:

"The nations that do not seek national nuclear weapons can be sure that if they need our strong support against some threat of nuclear blackmail, then they will have it."

Because the President was discussing Communist China and Asia in the preceding portions of his remarks, public explanations of his intent placed his "nuclear blackmail" comment in that context.

Literally, however, there was no such limitation on the President's phrasing. He did not specify "free world" or "non-Communist" nations, which is the usual semantic practice in Government statements of that nature.

Administration sources declined yesterday to make any statement of amplification on the public record, even after one nationally syndicated columnist publicly asked if the President's remark represented an "impulsive act." The President's statement will stand on the record, officials said, as it was delivered.

There appear to be the following reasons for what must now be counted as an element of deliberate ambiguity in the President's remark:

The major purpose behind the President's pledge to come to the aid of nations threatened with nuclear blackmail was to discourage other nations from leaping into the production of nuclear weapons

in the belief that it is their only means of self-defense in a nuclear age.

Under present circumstances the President's pledge applies most directly to what are variously called "free world" or "non-Communist" nations.

But the President and his advisers chose to avoid such terminology. Their language left the possibility that at some point in the future a Communist nation might want to break from Moscow's or Peking's fold and seek protection under the American nuclear umbrella if threatened with nuclear blackmail. Communist Yugoslavia, for example, already operates outside the blocs.

Question of Albania

Does this mean that a country like Communist Albania, which follows Peking's line, could claim United States protection if it were threatened with nuclear attack by the Soviet Union? Informal sources reply that the question is "too hypothetical" to warrant a specific response.

Equally, no official wants to specify now just what nations are in, and what nations are out, of the embrace of the American pledge. It is said that it would not be in the interest of the United States to make such a delineation. Nor does anyone want to say at this point just how important the President's statement may become in future American foreign policy. That apparently depends on events that no one can now forecast.